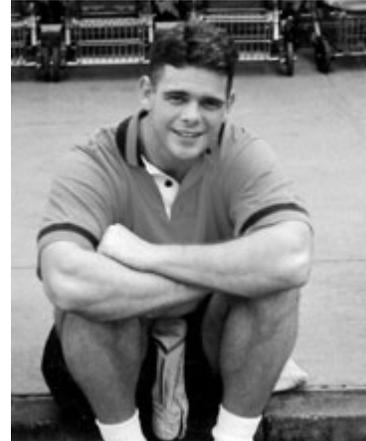


## Two Views, One Message: The Importance of Donation

"I was still in the healing process," Patti Nice remembers. "I didn't know how to go about it, but I really wanted to let the recipients know how good I felt that they benefited through Chris."

So in May 1999, nearly three years after her only son was killed in a motorcycle accident at age 23, Nice decided to write to those who had received Christopher's bone and tissue donations. With the Northwest Tissue Center serving as intermediary, she sent her letter.

The first response came quickly. And what Georgia Rayson wrote touched the grieving mother more than she could have expected.



Chris Nice loved people, and ultimately, helped many.

### A POWERFUL GIFT

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"I can't begin to tell you how grateful I am ...for this wonderful blessing in my life," said Rayson in the closing lines of the letter.

The story that preceded those summarizing words illustrates how much the donation of bone or tissue can mean to recipients. It can literally change their lives, as it did for the Libby, Montana resident.



The Raysons: Georgia and husband Kelly

She had been born in the 1940s with bone abnormalities that caused her feet to tilt severely inward. "I wore out the inner sides of my shoes," she wrote. As she aged, the problem worsened and her interior ankles nearly touched the floor when she walked.

Perhaps as debilitating as her physical difficulties were the childhood psychological and emotional effects of her very visible disability. Unfortunately, money and expertise were both scarce, so surgical correction was not an option. As she noted in

her letter, "During the war, my family didn't have the finances to buy good shoes for me."

There were dresses, though. Much to Rayson's dismay, dresses were mandatory attire for schoolgirls of that era, and unlike the long pants she usually wore, dresses revealed her feet. "What's wrong with your feet?" was a remark she heard often. So she wore pants under her dress on the way to and from school to hide her deformity as much as possible. At night before going to bed, she would look at her feet and cry.

Still, she persevered and lived her life: went to business school, worked for the U.S. Forest Service, married, had two children and five grandchildren. And she continued trying to find a solution to her foot problems. Over the years, she saw a number of podiatrists and tried various orthopedic shoes that proved to be only "unbearable and ugly."

Frustrated by her lifelong ailment and no longer optimistic about relief, she quit seeking help at age 55. Then things got worse. "I developed a growth on a toe on my right foot," she recalled. So in early 1997, she went to the town's newest foot doctor, Dr. David L. Neumann, who scheduled her for surgery to remove the growth.

Then he asked to examine her left foot, which was the most severely affected. "I agreed, with doubt in my heart," Rayson said. Dr. Neumann explained that he could surgically repair the foot using a bone graft. She cried, she said, "Because I had lost hope."

She also was unaware of bone donation. "Well, I just couldn't believe that someone would be that giving! But I am so thankful." The subsequent 7-hour surgery on March 6, 1997 was a success. "I don't think twice about wearing dresses now!"

## **SPEAKING OUT**

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"Just knowing Georgia's doing well and communicating with her has been a blessing for me," says Patti Nice. "It's so wonderful to be able to talk to someone for whom Chris has made such a difference."

Corresponding with Rayson and other recipients has given Nice an opportunity to see the impact that her son's donation has had on their lives. She was so impressed that she has become a volunteer spokesperson for bone and tissue donation. She first spoke at NTC's Candlelight ceremony in 1998 and later at hospitals.

It wasn't easy. "I had never spoken in public before; the thought of speaking terrified me," she said. "But it's such a wonderful message – telling people how they can give so much to so many others – that I overcame my fear. I'm still speaking. It's fulfilling, healing, and it honors Chris. "I love knowing how valuable the message is and what good can come of it."

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF ASKING**

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Potential donors aren't the only audience Nice targets. "I know that I can make a real difference by reaching those who need to ask other families about donation."

Her experience makes the point. "All of us in the family were donors on our driver's licenses for years, but we didn't realize that we had to be asked anyway at the time of a death," she explained. "And Chris' wife, Barb, and I were so overwhelmed by his accident that we didn't think of donation as we sat in the hospital that night. If a nurse hadn't approached us about consenting, we would not have thought to bring it up." Chris' mother and wife were in agreement to consent.

Consequently, Nice's word to nurses and other trained hospital staff is, "Ask." She implores them not to be intimidated by the situation. "It's not a burden to family members; it's an opportunity for them to make a conscious decision to save another life. They have to be given that option."

And pamphlets just won't do, she insists. "It's such an important step for hospital personnel to understand how critical their help is. Written material, no matter how well done, can't compare with the personal touch."

(Editor's note: Working through Northwest Tissue Center staff and attending transplant doctors, donor families and recipients both must first agree in writing to correspond with each other before either name is released to the other.)